

NATURAL HERITAGE TRUST - PHASE 3

537. Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

Given the need for urgency in negotiations with the federal government on phase 3 of the Natural Heritage Trust funding arrangements and the strong support from Western Australia's natural resource management groups for the regional funding model, I ask -

- (1) Will the minister provide an assurance to the community that every effort is being made to reach a bilateral agreement for NHT3 at the earliest possible opportunity?
- (2) Will the minister now assure the Parliament that the regional natural resource management groups have been consulted in this process?
- (3) Is the minister aware that delays in the negotiations may cause ongoing difficulties for continuity of projects delivered by the regional natural resource management groups?
- (4) Does the state government have a plan to support regional natural resource management groups in the event that negotiations have not been concluded before the federal government moves into caretaker mode ahead of the next federal election?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

Hon Murray Criddle has asked an excellent and very timely question. The full response is lengthy and I ask for it to be tabled and incorporated into *Hansard*. However, the short answer is -

- (1) Yes.
- (2) Yes.
- (3) Yes.
- (4) Those plans are under development.

I seek leave to table the response and have it incorporated into *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

[See paper 2919.]

The following material was incorporated -

I thank the Hon. Member for some notice of this question.

- Every effort is, and will be made to reach agreement with the Australian Government on NHT3. The Federal budget included an allocation for NHT3 of \$395 million per year for five years from 2008/09. However, there were no details provided on the terms and conditions, allocations to States or allocations for regional groups. It is not known how much of this money will be allocated to Commonwealth programs and Commonwealth administration.

It is therefore extremely difficult to negotiate an agreement on this matter while we do not have any details on the likely allocation of funding to Western Australia or the terms and conditions likely to be imposed. As a result I have written to my Federal counterparts seeking further information and will proceed with formal negotiations as soon as possible.

- I can assure the Parliament that I have met with Regional Natural Resource Management Groups on this matter and the natural resource management Directors-General have also met with them on several occasions. However, it is extremely difficult to develop a position without the required detail of the proposal.

I can also assure Parliament that when we have details from the Australian Government the Regional Natural Resource Management Groups will be consulted and will also be represented on the reference group for the negotiations.

- I can assure the member that I am acutely aware of the difficulties that will be caused by any delays in negotiations and that we are doing everything we can to get details from the Australian Government and get negotiations underway.

- The State Government is fully committed to on-going support for Regional Natural Resource Management Groups and is developing plans to ensure they continue to function if there is a delay in negotiations or if Commonwealth funding is not forthcoming.
